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ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences related to pupils' sex in female teachers' perceptions of pupil social behavior and related these differences to reading achievement. A questionnaire was utilized to measure teachers' perceptions of pupil behavior. Data was obtained from a sample of 20 female first grade teachers and their pupils, 220 girls and 219 boys. Teacher praise and criticism behaviors were recorded through an author-constructed Classroom Observation Record. Data was analyzed through correlation procedures and analysis of variance techniques. Results indicated that teachers perceived boys as displaying significantly more negative behavior than girls. Boys were criticized significantly more often than girls and received significantly lower reading achievement scores. Pupils of either sex who rated as aggressive and hostile received low achievement scores. (RT)

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Pupil Sex as a Variable in Teacher Perception of Classroom Behavior[1]

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> In ordinary practices the factor of attitudes is often forgotten in the behavior equation. When a parent or teacher is distressed by the behavior of a child, the usual assumption is that the difficulty is with the child . . . (However) it is impossible to consider a child's behavior apart from the attitudes that are taken toward his conduct. The two are intimately related and bound up in the same issue. (Wickman, 1929)

Over forty years ago the main emphasis in a classic study by Wickman was the comparison of the seriousness of children's behavior as perceived by teachers and mental health experts. His study stressed the importance of teacher's perceptions of classroom behaviors. In the intervening forty two years, there has been more than a dozen similar or identical repetitions of the original study (Westbrook, 1970), but few of these studies have attempted to examine the relationship between teacher's perceptions of behavior and pupil achievement. In fact there have been relatively few investigations of the relationships between what teachers do in the classroom and pupil achievement (Nuthall, 1969; Meux, 1967).

One could go a step further and state that the sex factor has been almost completely overlooked when studying teacher effects. Educators know that sex differences in learning, as measured by achievement, do, in fact, exist. There is ample evidence that boys have a significantly

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higher proportion of learning and behavior disorders than girls (Kowitz, 1965; Wilson, 1966). Nearly two-thirds of all grade repeaters are boys and a significantly higher proportion of boys than girls are classified as under-achievers (Peltier, 1968). Sex differences in reading are most obvious in studies done in clinical settings where approximately 90 per cent of the referrals are boys (Aaron, 1961; Fabian, 1965; McCollum and Shapiro, 1947).

Research increasingly indicates many sex differences of potential educational significance but the majority of studies have tended to overlook the possibility that sex could be a pertinent variable (even though it is easily identifiable) and proceed on the assumption that processes of learning are identical for both male and female students (Waetjens and Grambs, 1963).

With the mounting evidence that teacher characteristics and behaviors affect learning to read in particular, (Kerfoot, 1967), more study should be given to differential sex treatment in the classroom.

The purpose of this research was to investigate sex differences in teachers' perceptions of classroom behaviors and their relationships to reading achievement. The study examines the following questions:

1. Do teachers differ in their perceptions of how boys and girls behave in the classroom?
2. Is there a relationship between the perceived behavior and reading achievement?
3. Is there a relationship between the teachers' use of praise and criticism and teachers' perceptions of social behaviors?
4. Is there a relationship between the teachers' use of praise and criticism and pupil reading achievement?

Past research on teachers' perception of classroom behavior indicates that teachers perceive the problem child as identified chiefly by annoying, disorderly, irresponsible, aggressive, untruthful, and disobedient behavior (Stouffer-Owens). In Wickmans' study (1929), boys were considered (by teachers) to be more difficult to manage than girls and the incidence of reported problems among them was greater than among girls. Wickman felt that the teacher's ideas of acceptable behavior tended in the direction of the distinguishing characteristics of girl behavior. The teachers preferred the less active more compliant behavior of girls to the more aggressive, independent behavior of boys.

Critics of the educational system claim that schools "educate for docility" (Friedenberg, 1964; Holt, 1964; Goodman, 1965; Silberman, 1970). Silberman (1970) feels that this encouragement of docility may explain why girls tend to be more successful in school than boys.

> Passivity and docility are more in keeping with the behavior the culture expects of girls outside of school than the behavior it expects of boys. The phenomenon is cumulative and self-reinforcing; the behavior demanded in school is more feminine than masculine; girls adapt better; therefore school, and an interest in school affairs, tends to be defined as feminine, particularly among ethnic and social groups that place a high premium on masculinity. Perhaps as a result . . . boys tend to do less well in school than girls, and are vastly more susceptible to learning and emotional problems. (Silberman, 1970, p. 153)

Research studies tend to support Silberman's speculations. For example, when teachers asked students why they wanted to read better, boys and girls showed major differences in their attitudes toward the importance of

reading. Girls more often associated reading improvement with personal enjoyment and relaxation than did boys. Girls also gave more consideration to the status and social acceptance that are associated with reading proficiency (Strang, 1968). Since many boys perceive reading as feminine, they do not think it is appropriate nor important in the male role (Powell, 1967).

Turning to teacher's actual classroom behaviors, results of studies in which measures of teacher approval and disapproval were used as observational variables indicate a tendency for approval to be associated with higher pupil achievement and for criticism to be associated with lower achievement. Although disapproval and criticism appear to be more consistent in their effects than approval and praise, not all instances of approval facilitated learning nor all instances of disapproval hindered learning (Rosenshine, 1969). In seven out of thirteen studies reviewed by Rosenshine teachers use of criticism of pupils yielded a significant negative relationship with some measure of achievement.

Classroom interactional research which study the sex variable show that teachers interact more with boys than girls (Felsenthal, 1969; Jackson, Silberman, and Wolfson, 1969; Jackson and Lahaderne, 1967; and Spaulding, 1963). This interaction is quite often negative in nature. One of the few studies designed specifically to investigate teachers' behavior with males as contrasted with female pupils was reported by Meyer and Thompson (1956). Results showed that

boys received a significantly larger number of teacher disapproval contacts than did girls. However this study did not attempt to study the relationship between teacher behaviors and pupil achievement.

A more recent study also indicates that boys receive a greater number of disciplinary messages from their teachers than girls do (Jackson and Lahaderne, 1967). Contrary results were found in a study designed to investigate if female first-grade teachers discriminated against boys and favored girls in the teaching of reading. In this study teachers did not call on girls more than boys nor did they direct more negative comments toward boys during reading instruction (Davis and Slobodian, 1967).

Procedures

Twenty first grade teachers, all females, completed a questionnaire which requested them to check any or all of eight behaviors which characterized each of their students. The categories of behavior were as follows: eager, co-operative, obedient, helpful, defiant, hostile, destructive, and aggressive.

The teachers' praise and criticism contacts were recorded through an author-constructed Classroom Observation Record (Felsenthal, 1969). Each teacher was observed during two different reading periods and while teaching three different reading ability groups. Information on pupil reading achievement was obtained by the use of a reading readiness test administered at the end of the kindergarten year and a

reading achievement test administered one year later at the end of first grade.

Subjects

The twenty female first grade teachers were randomly selected and requested by administrators to participate in the study. Their age range was 21 years to 68 years with a median age of 31. The years teaching experience ranged from one to 44 years with a median of six years.

The pupil sample included 438 first graders, 220 girls and 218 boys. The children attended twelve different schools representing a wide socio-economic range.

Method

The research employed correlational procedures, analyses of variance, and t tests. Inter-correlations were determined using the variables pupil reading achievement, teacher's classroom use of praise and criticism and teachers' perceptions of classroom behaviors in each of the eight social behavior categories.

Results

Teachers perceived boys and girls as behaving differently in the classroom. Girls were perceived as being significantly more eager, co-operative, obedient, and helpful than boys. Boys were perceived as being significantly more often defiant and aggressive. Table 1 gives the means, standard deviations, and t scores for teachers' perceptions of classroom behavior.

Table 1

Sex Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Behaviors

Behavior Categories	Boys (N=218)		Girls (N=220)		Sex Difference
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
Eager	.555	.498	.691	.463	3.159**
Co-operative	.807	.395	.914	.282	3.250**
Obedient	.670	.471	.859	.349	4.796***
Helpful	.702	.459	.818	.387	2.874**
Defiant	.078	.269	.023	.149	2.665**
Destructive	.018	.135	.005	.067	1.380
Hostile	.023	.150	.005	.067	1.679
Aggressive	.183	.388	.045	.209	4.654***

** p .01
*** p .001

There is a relationship between teachers' perceptions of classroom behavior and pupil reading achievement. For both girls and boys there was a significant positive correlation between reading achievement and teachers' perceptions of the more positive classroom behaviors such as eagerness, co-operativeness, obedience, and helpfulness. There was a negative but nonsignificant correlation between reading achievement and the more negative behaviors of defiance, destructiveness, hostility, and aggressiveness.

When analyzing the data by sex, results were similar except for the lack of a significant correlation between reading achievement and the category "co-operative" for the boys only. There was a positive but nonsignificant correlation for girls' reading achievement and the category "aggressiveness."

Table 2 gives the correlation coefficients between pupil reading achievement and teachers' perception of classroom behavior.

Table 2

Correlation Between Pupil Reading Achievement and Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Behavior

Behavior Categories	Boys	Girls	Combined Groups
Eager	.388***	.227*	.336***
Co-operative	.192	.287**	.254**
Obedient	.284**	.252*	.308**
Helpful	.295**	.335***	.338***
Defiant	-.064	-.178	-.125
Destructive	-.107	-.175	-.135
Hostile	-.062	-.059	-.075
Aggressive	-.043	-.007	-.073

* p .05
** p .01
*** p .001

There were no significant correlations between teachers use of praise and their perception of classroom behavior. However the correlations were generally in the predicted direction with positive correlations between use of praise and the more positive classroom behaviors and negative correlations between use of praise and the more negative classroom behaviors. Table 3a gives the correlation coefficients between teachers' use of praise and their perception of social behaviors.

Table 3a

Correlation Between Teachers' Classroom Use of Praise and Teachers' Perceptions of Pupil Behavior

Behavior Categories	Boys	Girls	Combined Groups
Eager	-.118	-.019	-.072
Co-operative	.035	.085	.052
Obedient	.101	.122	.102
Helpful	.086	.114	.095
Defiant	-.049	.010	.024
Destructive	-.042	.040	-.038
Hostile	-.008	.040	-.015
Aggressive	.036	.009	-.022

There were significant negative correlations for teachers' use of criticism and the categories "co-operative" and "obedient" for the combined group. Analyzing the data by sex, no significant correlations were found for boys but significant negative correlations for girls were found for the categories "co-operative" and "obedient." For girls only, there was also a significant positive correlation between use of praise and the category destructiveness. Table 3b presents the correlation coefficients for teachers' use of criticism and teachers' perception of classroom behavior.

Table 3b

Correlation Between Teachers' Classroom Use of Criticism and Teachers' Perceptions of Pupil Behavior

Behavior Categories	Boys	Girls	Combined Groups
Eager	-.055	-.006	-.043
Co-operative	-.065	-.347***	-.227*
Obedient	-.156	-.298**	-.247*
Helpful	-.071	-.117	-.100

Table 3b (cont'd)

Behavior Categories	Boys	Girls	Combined Groups
Defiant	.139	.123	.167
Destructive	.124	.342***	.173
Hostile	.078	-.033	.033
Aggressive	.015	.038	.071

* p .05
** p .01
*** p .001

The reading achievement between boys and girls differed significanntly. At the end of the kindergarten year, there were no significant differences between the groups in readiness to read. One year later the girls scored significantly higher than the boys on reading vocabulary and comprehension. Table 4 gives the mean scores standard deviations, and t score for pupils reading readiness and achievement.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Reading Readiness and Achievement

	Boys (N=218)		Girls (N=220)		Sex Difference
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
Reading Readiness	65.29	15.13	67.92	15.26	1.81
Reading Achievement					
Vocabulary	32.67	10.49	36.77	8.80	4.43**
Comprehension	19.05	7.74	22.61	7.76	4.93**
Total	51.71	17.20	59.35	15.21	4.92**

** p .01

Teachers did not praise girls more than boys but boys were criticized significantly more often than girls. However, no significant correlations were found between the teachers' use of praise and criticism and pupil reading achievement for either sex. The nonsignificant correlations between use of criticism and reading achievement were in the predicted direction indicating the less the criticism, the higher the reading achievement for both boys and girls.

The correlations between use of praise and reading achievement differed for boys and girls. There was a nonsignificant negative correlation between the boys' reading achievement and teachers' use of praise. The opposite was true for girls with their reading achievement positively correlated with teachers' use of praise. Table 5 indicates the correlation coefficients for the relationship between teachers' use of praise and criticism and pupil reading achievement.

Table 5

Correlation Between Teachers' Use of Praise and Criticism and Pupils Reading Achievement

Classroom Behavior	Boys	Girls	Combined Group
Praise contacts	-.060	.056	-.009
Criticism contacts	-.097	-.082	-.125

Summary and Discussion

Teachers in this study perceive differences in the classroom behavior of boys and girls. Girls are perceived as behaving more positively than the boys. Specifically,

teachers perceive girls as being more eager, co-operative, obedient, and helpful while boys are perceived as being more defiant and aggressive. Additional study might investigate if boys are indeed more negative than girls in their classroom behavior. Only teacher praise and blame contacts were studied and pupil behavior was not recorded. Teachers did criticize boys more often than girls but it is not known if boys provoked this negative behavior from their teachers.

The relationship between teachers' expectations and pupil achievement seems substantuated in this study. For both sexes, higher reading achievement is associated with the more positive social behaviors and lower reading achievement is related to the more negative social behaviors.

However, even though boys were critized by teachers more often than girls, there was no significant relationship between the frequency of negative reinforcement and reading achievement for either sex. Fewer negative teacher contacts were associated with higher reading achievement for both sexes but the relationship was not statistically significant. There was a tendency for praise contacts to be associated with higher reading achievement for the girls but not the boys. There is a need to investigate not only the kinds of teacher contacts but the amount. Perhaps boys differ from girls in their need for reinforcement of any type. Do boys need to be allowed to assert their independence - the masculine quality which is encouraged in their early social development? Do teachers interfere with the learning process of boys?

This study has revealed again that sex differences in learning how to read do exist. The same boys who were equally ready to read at the end of kindergarten scored significantly lower than the girls in reading achievement at the end of first grade. Teachers perceived boys as behaving differently than girls and they differed in their interaction with them. The teacher "effect" factor is a significant variable when studying sex differences and the learning process.

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